

R 060550Z APR 91  
FM AMEMBASSY RIYADH  
TO USIA WASHDC 9181  
SECSTATE WASHDC 8774  
INFO RUFHAD/AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI  
AMEMBASSY ALGIERS  
AMEMBASSY AMMAN  
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT  
AMEMBASSY CAIRO  
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS  
AMEMBASSY DOHA  
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT  
AMEMBASSY LONDON  
AMEMBASSY MANAMA  
AMEMBASSY MUSCAT  
AMEMBASSY NICOSIA  
AMEMBASSY PARIS  
AMEMBASSY RABAT  
AMEMBASSY SANAA  
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV  
AMEMBASSY TUNIS  
AMCONSUL DHAHRAN  
AMCONSUL JEDDAH  
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM  
FBIS LONDON  
FBIS NICOSIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 RIYADH 03320

USIA

USIA FOR NEA, P/G, P/M, P/FW, P/PFN, R  
STATE FOR NEA/ARP, INR

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR

TAGS: PREL PROP PGOV SA

SUBJECT: THE SAUDI PRESS: PROFILES OF INDIVIDUAL PAPERS

REFS: (A) RIYADH 3311 (B) RIYADH 2749

11. CONFIDENTIAL--ENTIRE TEXT.

12. SUMMARY. THIS CABLE GIVES BRIEF DESCRIPTIONS OF SAUDI DAILY NEWSPAPERS, THEIR INDIVIDUAL ORIGINS, SPECIAL SLANTS, AND ESTIMATED CIRCULATION FIGURES. (ONLY "AL-HAYAT," A SAUDI-CONTROLLED DAILY PUBLISHED IN LONDON IS NOT INCLUDED). REF A DESCRIBED THE STRUCTURE OF THE SAUDI PRESS ESTABLISHMENT, SOCIAL AND GOVERNMENTAL INHIBITORS ON PRESS FREEDOM, AND THE POSSIBLE LOCAL IMPACT OF THE INVASION OF SAUDI ARABIA BY THE FOREIGN PRESS DURING OPERATIONS DESERT SHIELD/STORM. REF B COVERED INCREASED SAUDI INVESTMENT, AND POSSIBLE EFFORTS TO HAVE MORE EDITORIAL INFLUENCE, IN THE INTERNATIONAL ARABIC PRESS. POST WILL PROVIDE STATE AND USIA MEDIA ELEMENTS WITH A SEPARATE UNCLASSIFIED PROFILE, EXTRACTED FROM THIS CABLE, FOR DESKTOP REFERENCE. END SUMMARY.

13. "AL-SHARQ AL-AWSAT" (SAUDI-OWNED, LONDON-BASED, MODERATE, INTERNAL CIRCULATION: 100,000-125,000, INTERNATIONAL CIRCULATION: 200,000-300,000). FOUNDED IN 1977, "AL-SHARQ AL-AWSAT" IS SAUDI ARABIA'S MOST INFLUENTIAL PUBLICATION AND ARGUABLY ONE OF THE TWO OR THREE MOST INFLUENTIAL NEWSPAPERS IN THE ARAB WORLD. "AL-SHARQ AL-AWSAT" IS PRINTED IN RIYADH, JEDDAH, CAIRO, DHAHRAN, CASABLANCA, LONDON, FRANKFURT, MARSEILLE, PARIS, AND NEW YORK. OWNERS OF RECORD ARE THE AL-HAFIZ FAMILY, BUT THE GOVERNOR OF RIYADH, PRINCE SALMAN BIN ABDUL AZIZ AL SAUD (A FULL BROTHER OF KING FAHD) IS RUMORED TO BE A MAJOR BEHIND-THE-SCENES INVESTOR IN THE PAPER. "AL-SHARQ AL-AWSAT'S" INFLUENCE IS MORE RELATED TO THE GLOBAL REACH OF THE PAPER THAN THE COLORFULNESS OF ITS EDITORIAL WRITING, BUT A FEW WRITERS (NOTABLY SAUDI AMBASSADOR TO BAHRAIN, GHAZI AL-GOSAIBI) HAVE DEVOTED FOLLOWINGS. THE PAPER FREQUENTLY TAKES A MORE MODERATE STANCE ON ARAB-ISRAELI ISSUES THAN OTHER SAUDI NEWSPAPERS REFLECTING THE DIFFERING VIEWS AND MORE COSMOPOLITAN NATURE OF ITS INTERNATIONAL READERSHIP.

¶4. "UKAZ" (JEDDAH-BASED, PRO-GOVERNMENT, ESTIMATED CIRCULATION: 110,000-125,000). SISTER PAPER OF THE "SAUDI GAZETTE." FOUNDED IN 1960, "UKAZ" IS THE MOST POPULAR PAPER IN THE HIJAZ AND THE MOST WIDELY-CIRCULATED DAILY IN SAUDI ARABIA DUE TO DECLINING COMPETITION FROM OTHER HIJAZI PAPERS. IN MID-1980S, "UKAZ" WAS OFTEN PERCEIVED AS A NEWSPAPER IN DECLINE DUE TO FAILURE TO INVEST IN MODERNIZATION, BUT HAS INVESTED IN IMPROVED PRINTING FACILITIES AND STEADILY EXPANDED CIRCULATION. DURING NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1990, THE SAUDI PRESS LURCHED TOWARDS SENSATIONALISM AND YELLOW JOURNALISM IN SMEARING STATES PERCEIVED AS PRO-IRAQI. "UKAZ" WAS GENERALLY VIEWED AS THE MOST AGGRESSIVE AND SENSATIONALIST IN PRINTING SUCH STORIES, PARTICULARLY STORIES DIRECTED AGAINST YEMEN AND PRESIDENT SALEH OR THE OCCASIONAL "INSPIRED LIE," SUCH AS A RECENT REPORT OF THE DEATH OF SADDAM. LIKE PULITZER AND HEARST OF YORE, THIS POLICY PAID FINANCIAL DIVIDENDS AS "UKAZ" GRABBED MARKET SHARE AND INCREASED ITS CIRCULATION VIS-A-VIS OTHER SAUDI DAILIES.

¶5. "AL-RIYADH" (RIYADH-BASED, PRO-GOVERNMENT, ESTIMATED CIRCULATION: 100,000-120,000). SISTER PAPER OF THE ENGLISH "RIYADH DAILY." FOUNDED IN 1964, "AL-RIYADH" AND "AL-JAZIRA" COMPETE FIERCELY FOR INFLUENCE IN NAJD AND EACH CLAIM TO BE A LARGER AND MORE INFLUENTIAL PAPER THAN THE OTHER. (WE GIVE THE EDGE TO "AL-RIYADH" BY A SLIM MARGIN.) COMPARATIVELY PROGRESSIVE FOR A SAUDI NEWSPAPER, "AL-RIYADH" WAS THE FIRST SAUDI NEWSPAPER TO OPEN A WOMEN'S BUREAU. ITS LITERARY PAGE IS DEEMED TO BE BY FAR THE BEST IN THE KINGDOM. ITS EDITOR, TURKI AL-SUDAIRI, IS GENERALLY REGARDED AS ONE OF SAUDI ARABIA'S BEST WRITERS AND ENJOYS A MEASURE OF ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT RESPECTABILITY HAVING ONCE BEEN BANNED FROM WRITING DUE TO A PARTICULARLY BITING DENUNCIATION HE WROTE OF THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION IN THE MID-EIGHTIES, THOUGH SUDAIRI IS FIRMLY IN THE CAMP OF GOVERNMENT LOYALISTS. USIS RELATIONS WITH THIS PAPER, ALTHOUGH CORRECT, HAVE NEVER BEEN CLOSE. DESPITE OUR BEST EFFORTS, WE HAVE NEVER BEEN ABLE TO GET "AL-RIYADH" AS INVOLVED IN USIS PROGRAMMING AS OTHER PAPERS.

¶6. "AL-JAZIRA" (RIYADH-BASED, PRO-GOVERNMENT, ESTIMATED CIRCULATION: 95,000-110,000). FOUNDED IN 1963 AND SISTER PAPER OF "AL-MASA' IYA." AS NOTED ABOVE, "AL-JAZIRA" AND "AL-RIYADH" COMPETE FIERCELY AGAINST EACH OTHER. USIS RIYADH ENJOYS A CLOSER RELATIONSHIP WITH THIS PAPER THAN ANY OTHER. (IN 1986, THE PAPER COYLY SUGGESTED THAT QADDAFI MAY HAVE GOTTEN WHAT WAS COMING TO HIM WHEN THE U.S. BOMBED LIBYA IN 1986 IN COMPARISON WITH THE UNIFORMLY NEGATIVE REACTIONS OF OTHER SAUDI PAPERS). MANAGING EDITOR, JASER AL-JASER, WRITES THE ONLY DAILY EDITORIAL DEVOTED TO POLITICAL COMMENTARY IN THE KINGDOM AND IS WIDELY FOLLOWED, ALTHOUGH, IN THE VOLUME OF HIS PRODUCTION, QUALITY SOMETIMES SUFFERS. (AL-SUDAIRI AT "AL-RIYADH," BY CONTRAST, PRODUCES ONLY A WEEKLY COLUMN).

¶7. "AL-MADINA" (JEDDAH-BASED, PRO-GOVERNMENT, MORE RELIGIOUS THAN OTHER SAUDI PAPERS, ESTIMATED CIRCULATION: 75,000-80,000). FOUNDED IN MADINA IN 1936, "AL-MADINA" IS SAUDI ARABIA'S OLDEST PAPER. IN THE EARLY 1980S, THE PAPER LED "UKAZ" IN CIRCULATION, BUT HAS BADLY STUMBLED IN RECENT YEARS ALLOWING "UKAZ" TO ESTABLISH A COMMANDING LEAD IN THE HIJAZI MEDIA MARKET. THE PAPER IS THOUGHT TO BE IN FINANCIAL TROUBLE.

¶8. "AL-YOM" (DAMMAM-BASED, PRO-GOVERNMENT, ESTIMATED CIRCULATION: 75,000-90,000). THE PAPER ENJOYED A REPUTATION IN LATE 1970S AS A PAPER OF MILD NASSERIST SYMPATHIES LEADING TO A CRACKDOWN IN 1981-1982 WHICH RESULTED IN THE DISMISSALS OF SEVERAL JOURNALISTS, INCLUDING THE PAPER'S CHIEF EDITOR. UNDER NEW EDITORSHIP AND WITH NO POLITICAL AXES TO GRIND, "AL-YOM" MAKES NO PRETENSIONS TO BE ANYTHING OTHER THAN A LOCAL PAPER CATERING TO EASTERN PROVINCE AUDIENCES, ALSO CIRCULATED IN BAHRAIN, QATAR, AND ABU DHABI. IN THE EARLY 1980S, THE PAPER DREAMED OF ESTABLISHING AN ENGLISH EDITION, BUT

THESE PLANS SEEM FIRMLY SHELVED.

¶9. "AN-NADWA" (MAKKAH-BASED, RELIGIOUSLY CONSERVATIVE, ESTIMATED CIRCULATION OF 25,000-30,000). "AN-NADWA'S" SMALL CIRCULATION MASKS THE IMPORTANCE AND INFLUENCE OF THIS PAPER WHICH IS A REDOUBT OF RELIGIOUSLY CONSERVATIVE OPINION IN THE KINGDOM. THE PAPER'S EDITOR, YUSUF DAMANHOURY, IS ONE OF SAUDI ARABIA'S MOST RESPECTED JOURNALISTS AND ENJOYS A REPUTATION AS AN EDITOR WILLING TO TAKE RISKS AND MAKE PRINCIPALLED STANDS. FOR EXAMPLE, "AL-NADWA" WAS THE ONLY SAUDI PAPER WHICH CONDEMNED THE IRAQI INVASION OF KUWAIT BEFORE THE SAUDI GOVERNMENT ADOPTED AN OFFICIAL POSITION ON THE ISSUE. THE PAPER ALSO USED TO BE KNOWN FOR ITS STRONG SUPPORT OF THE PALESTINIAN CAUSE, AN EDITORIAL LINE FREQUENTLY ATTRIBUTED TO A LARGE NUMBER OF PALESTINIAN STAFFERS AT THE PAPER. RECENTLY, HOWEVER, THE PAPER HAS SWITCHED 180 DEGREES ON ITS SUPPORT FOR THE PLO AND HAS BEEN THE MOST OUTSPOKEN OF SAUDI PAPERS IN CRITICIZING ARAFAT'S LEADERSHIP, INCLUDING CARRYING EDITORIALS CALLING ON ARAFAT TO STEP DOWN AND QUESTIONING WHETHER THE PLO IS INDEED THE "SOLE LEGITIMATE REPRESENTATIVE" OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE. SEVERAL STAFFERS AT THE PAPER ARE ALSO EMPLOYED BY THE MUSLIM WORLD LEAGUE. THE PAPER'S LOCATION IN MAKKAH INHIBITS USIS CONTACTS WITH THE PAPER DUE TO THE INABILITY OF NON-MUSLIMS TO TRAVEL TO THE HOLY CITY, ALTHOUGH WE HAVE CONTACT WITH ITS CORRESPONDENTS IN RIYADH AND JEDDAH.

¶10. "AL-BILAAD" (JEDDAH-BASED, PRO-GOVERNMENT, ESTIMATED CIRCULATION: 25,000-30,000). FOUNDED IN 1959, IT IS GENERALLY AGREED TO BE ONE OF THE WEAKEST OF SAUDI ARABIA'S DAILIES. ITS CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD IS AMIN ABDULLAH KARKORI, WHO, ALONG WITH A CADRE OF BUSINESSMEN AND LOCAL WRITERS, ARE THE MAINSTAYS OF THE PAPER'S EDITORIAL STAFF. THE PAPER EMPLOYS FEW REPORTERS AND RELIES HEAVILY ON WIRE SERVICES FOR ITS NEWS COVERAGE. EDITOR-IN-CHIEF ABDUL AZIZ NAHARI IS A UNIVERSITY LECTURER WITH M.A. AND PH.D. DEGREES FROM THE UNITED STATES. THE PAPER IS PROBABLY NOT A MONEY-MAKER.

¶11. "ARAB NEWS" (JEDDAH-BASED, PRO-GOVERNMENT, YET LIBERAL IN THE SAUDI CONTEXT, ESTIMATED CIRCULATION: 75,000-80,000. ALSO PUBLISHED IN CAIRO). SISTER PAPER OF "AL-SHARQ AL-AWSAT" AND FOUNDED IN 1975. BY FAR, THE MOST PROFESSIONAL OF THE ENGLISH-LANGUAGE PAPERS IN SAUDI ARABIA. ITS EDITOR, KHALID AL-MAENNA, IS WELL-KNOWN IN JEDDAH FOR HIS SENTIMENTS FAVORING GREATER POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN SAUDI ARABIA AND, IN NOVEMBER 1990, OPENLY ADMITS TO HAVING TESTED THE ACCEPTED BOUNDARIES OF SAUDI PRESS CENSORSHIP BY CARRYING STORIES ON THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN SAUDI SOCIETY AND HIGHLIGHTING COVERAGE OF THE PROCLAIMED KUWAITI COMMITMENT TO DEMOCRATIZATION. SAUDI AUTHORITIES WERE REPORTEDLY NOT AMUSED, TOLD AL-MAENNA TO STOP FLIRTING WITH THE REGULATIONS, AND AL-MAENNA HAS RELUCTANTLY COMPLIED. THE PAPER HAS SEVERAL WESTERN REPORTERS ON ITS STAFF TO ENSURE THAT EDITORIAL COPY REFLECTS PREVAILING ENGLISH SPELLING AND GRAMMAR.

¶12. "SAUDI GAZETTE" (JEDDAH-BASED, PRO-GOVERNMENT, ESTIMATED CIRCULATION: 25,000-35,000). SISTER PAPER OF "UKAZ." FOUNDED IN 1976, THE "SAUDI GAZETTE," WAS PERHAPS THE MOST ANTI-U.S. OF SAUDI PAPERS PRIOR TO DESERT SHIELD/STORM AND OCCASSIONALLY IS STILL SNIDE ABOUT U.S. POLICIES IN THE REGION. ITS FLAMBOYANT EDITOR IS RIDAH LARY, A SAUDI CITIZEN OF PERSIAN ORIGIN, NOTED FOR WRITING SOME OF SAUDI ARABIA'S LONGEST EDITORIALS WHICH EVEN ARABS CONCEDE FREQUENTLY GO ON AND ON WITHOUT EVER COMING TO THE POINT. THE "SAUDI GAZETTE'S" CHIEF CARTOONIST, ABDEL RAHIM ALIREZA, HAS A THIRD GRADER'S TALENT FOR ART AND HAS A PARTICULARLY STRONG ANTI-U.S. STREAK TO HIS CARTOONS WHOSE POINT IS FREQUENTLY INCOMPREHENSIBLE. (ONCE IN THE MID-1980S, A PARTICULARLY PIQUED USIS PAO REFUSED TO INCLUDE "SAUDI GAZETTE" EDITORIALS IN HIS USIS MEDIA REACTIONS STATING THAT HE DID NOT BELIEVE THEY WERE REFLECTIVE OF MAINSTREAM PUBLIC OPINION IN SAUDI ARABIA.) ALTHOUGH STILL SAUDI ARABIA'S SECOND LARGEST ENGLISH PAPER, THE NEWSPAPER HAS SUFFERED

QUALITATIVE DECLINES THROUGHOUT THE EIGHTIES AND REPORTEDLY SUFFERS FROM DECLINING READERSHIP. AS KHALID AL-MAENNA, THE EDITOR OF THE COMPETING "ARAB NEWS" ONCE REMARKED, "I HOPE RIDAH LARY STAYS EDITOR OF THE PAPER FOR ANOTHER TEN YEARS."

¶13. "RIYADH DAILY" (RIYADH-BASED, PRO-GOVERNMENT, ESTIMATED CIRCULATION: 15,000-25,000). THE PAPER CLAIMS ORIGINS IN THE MID-1970S WHEN IT WAS LITTLE MORE THAN A FEW XEROXED SHEETS STAPLED TOGETHER, BUT BECAME A SERIOUS NEWSPAPER IN 1985. UNDER A NEW EDITOR, TALAAT Wafa (AN M.A. HOLDER FROM GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY AND A PH.D. CANDIDATE AT CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY), THE PAPER HAS MADE MAJOR QUALITATIVE IMPROVEMENTS AND IS QUICKLY CATCHING UP ON THE "SAUDI GAZETTE" IN TERMS OF CIRCULATION. Wafa HAS INVESTED HEAVILY IN THE LATEST TECHNOLOGY AND USE OF COLOR PHOTOGRAPHY AT THE PAPER WHICH REPORTEDLY STILL MAKES PUBLICATION UNPROFITABLE, BUT THE PAPER'S MANAGEMENT SEEMS COMMITTED TO STRIVING AGGRESSIVELY TO COMPETE IN THE CROWDED SAUDI MARKET FOR ENGLISH NEWSPAPERS.

¶14. "AL-DHAHIRA" (LONDON-BASED, SISTER PUBLICATION OF "AL-SHARQ AL-AWSAT", CIRCULATION IN THE LOW THOUSANDS). "AL-DHAHIRA" WAS BROUGHT OUT AS AN AFTERNOON PAPER BY THE SAUDI RESEARCH AND MARKETING COMPANY (PUBLISHERS OF "AL-SHARQ AL-AWSAT" AND "ARAB NEWS") IN RESPONSE TO THE IRAQI INVASION OF KUWAIT AND THE INCREASED DEMAND FOR NEWS THROUGHOUT THE ARAB WORLD. THE PAPER DOES NOT HAVE EDITORIAL CONTENT AND LIMITS ITSELF TO PUBLISHING UP TO THE MINUTE WIRE SERVICE REPORTS ON REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS. THE FUTURE OF THE PUBLICATION IN THE WAKE OF THE GULF WAR IS UNCLEAR, BUT ITS CIRCULATION IS CERTAINLY SUPPORTED BY GOVERNMENT PURCHASES.

¶15. "AL-MASA' IYA" (RIYADH-BASED, PRO-GOVERNMENT, RELIGIOUSLY CONSERVATIVE, ESTIMATED CIRCULATION OF 25,000-35,000). SISTER PAPER OF "AL-JAZIRA." OPENED IN 1982 AS SAUDI ARABIA'S ONLY AFTERNOON NEWSPAPER. IN 1983, CAME UNDER HEAVY FIRE FROM RELIGIOUS ESTABLISHMENT AFTER PUBLISHING ARTICLES WHICH RELIGIOUS CONSERVATIVES FELT MOCKED ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS VALUES. TO AVOID CLOSURE, THE PAPER APPOINTED A NEW EDITOR FROM RIYADH'S ULTRA CONSERVATIVE IMAM MUHAMMAD UNIVERSITY WHO HAS SHOWN LITTLE DIRECTION IN LEADING THE PAPER ANYWHERE. THE PAPER IS REPORTEDLY IN FINANCIAL DIFFICULTY IN LIGHT OF COMPETITION FROM "AL-DHAHIRA" FOR A DECLINING AFTERNOON/EVENING READERSHIP.

¶16. COMMENT. FOR A COUNTRY WITH A TOTAL POPULATION OF ROUGHLY TWELVE MILLION (SEVEN OR EIGHT MILLION OF WHOM ARE SAUDIS, THE REMAINDER ARE EXPATRIATES RUNNING THE GAMUT FROM SOPHISTICATED WESTERN TECHNOCRATS TO IMPOVERISHED ASIAN SWEEPERS), SAUDI ARABIA HAS AN UNUSUALLY LARGE NUMBER OF DAILY NEWSPAPERS. THESE DOZEN PAPERS PROVIDE A LARGE VOLUME OF EDITORIALS AND NEWS ANALYSES FOR USIS MEDIA REACTIONS, BUT RARELY IS THERE ANY PROVOCATIVE DEVIATION FROM THE GOVERNMENT'S PERCEIVED VIEWS ON DOMESTIC OR INTERNATIONAL ISSUES. IN COMPARISON WITH OTHER MUSLIM COUNTRIES, THE SAUDI PRESS (BOTH IN THE ENGLISH, AND TO AN EVEN GREATER EXTENT, IN THE ARABIC PRESS) DEVOTES LARGE VOLUMES OF NEWSPRINT TO PROMOTING ISLAMIC PRACTICES AND PIETIES, AS A CONSTANT REINFORCER OF THE "CORRECTNESS" OF THE SAUDI VIEW OF ISLAM. (SUCH WRITINGS PROBABLY ATTRACT MORE READERS TO THE CONSERVATIVE PRESS THAN ANY COVERAGE OF INTERNATIONAL EVENTS.) WHILE THE NUMBER OF PAPERS AND JOURNALISTS CERTAINLY MERITS STRONG USIS ATTENTION, THE SAUDI PRESS ESTABLISHMENT, LIKE THE REST OF THE KINGDOM'S MODERN INFRASTRUCTURE (SLEEK SUPERHIGHWAYS, L.A.-STYLE HIGHRISES, AND 21ST CENTURY AIRPORTS), HAS AN AIR OF GIANTISM AND UNREALITY ABOUT IT. SUPERFICIALLY, THE SAUDI PRESS IS IMPRESSIVE AND GLITZY WITH ACCESS TO ALL OF THE WORLD'S MEDIA SOURCES AND THE LATEST AND MOST TECHNOLOGICALLY SOPHISTICATED PRODUCTION TECHNIQUES, YET WITHIN IT THERE IS A CERTAIN HOLLOWNESS AS EGYPTIAN AND SUDANESE EXPATRIATES TOIL TO ASSEMBLE THIS NUMERICALLY LARGE, BUT UNPROVOCATIVE, ARRAY OF DAILY PRESS PUBLICATIONS.

¶17. MINIMIZES CONSIDERED.

GILBERT